

SUMMARY OF THE STANDARDS FOR CLASSIFICATION

This summary is intended to be a general overview of the Standards for Classification. It does not take the place of the complete Standards for Classification published by the State Land Evaluation Advisory Council (SLEAC). Each applicant is responsible for compliance to the complete Standards for Classification. A copy of this document may be obtained from the Department of Financial Services.

FORESTRY: To qualify for this category, the property must be a minimum of twenty acres and must meet the standards for productive forestland or nonproductive forestland.

Productive forestland is a commercial forest crop that is physically accessible for harvesting when mature. Nonproductive forest land is not capable of growing a crop of commercial wood because of inaccessibility or adverse site conditions such as steep outcrops of rock, shallow soil on steep mountainsides, excessive steepness or other conditions that prohibit the growth and harvesting of a crop of trees suitable for commercial use.

The owner shall certify that the real estate is being used in a planned program of timber management and soil conservation practices. Certification of intent by the owner can be shown by providing (1) a signed commitment to maintain and protect forestland by documenting objectives to include methods of resource management and soil and water protection, or (2) submitting a plan prepared by a professional forester – the Forest Land Use Valuation Plan.

OPEN SPACE: To qualify for open space, the use must be consistent with the land use plan of the County. In general, the real estate must be subject to a perpetual conservation, historic or open space easement held by a public body; be part of an agricultural or forestal district approved by local government with a recorded commitment entered into with the governing body.

- Historic Resource Protection — Must be at least 5 acres, excluding housesite; be listed as an historic property or a contributing property in an historic district on the Virginia Landmarks Register or the National Register of Historic places; and be subject to a perpetual scenic, historic or open space easement or a seven to ten year recorded commitment with the County.
- Scenic Resource Protection — Must be at least 5 acres in size, excluding housesite; be contiguous to (as defined by the Code of Virginia) a scenic by-way with at least 300 foot frontage or to a scenic river; be subject to a perpetual open space easement or a 7 to 10 year recorded commitment with the County.

- Protection of Farmland for Future Agricultural Use — Must be at least 20 acres in size excluding housesite; be located in a rural area as defined by the County Comprehensive Plan. The owner must file and implement a management plan approved by the Soil and Water Conservation District. The property must be mowed at least twice a year to control noxious weeds and the owner must use applicable “best management” plans. There must be a minimum 10 year open space commitment to the County.
- Achievement of Comprehensive Planning and Community Development Goals — Must be at least 5 acres in size, excluding housesite; be protected by a permanent open space easement, scenic easement or be located in an agricultural or forestal district. Rural village and rural hamlet conservancy lots protected by permanent open space easements may qualify when they are at least 5 acres in size.

AGRICULTURAL AND HORTICULTURAL: To qualify, the property must be at least 5 acres in size, excluding housesite. The property must have a continual 5 year history of the bona fide production for commercial sale of plants or animals, or to the production of plant or animal products useful to man. Generally accepted products include livestock, dairy, poultry, aquaculture, nursery product, greenhouse products, flowers, plants, orchards and vineyards. Minimum animal units are listed in the Standards for Classification. Minimum crop yields must be at least one half of the County average for the prior 3 years.

The property owner must certify that the property is enrolled in a planned program of management and production of qualifying products. Such plans are available through the local Soil and Water Conservation District and require a Cooperator’s Agreement, which may be obtained from the Department of Financial Services. Other pertinent forms include the Affidavit of Prior Use (not required for Open Space) and the Declaration of Ineligible Land, pertaining to dwellings or other structures not related to special use.

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